
Michael Jackson

WORKSHEET A

Michael Jackson, who died in Los Angeles from a heart attack on June 25, 2009, aged only 50, was one of the most influential performers in the history of pop music.

Born in 1958 in Gary, Indiana (near Chicago), Michael had nine brothers and sisters. He started performing with four of his brothers in a boy band, the Jackson 5, before he was eight years old. They were signed by the famous Motown record label and had great success, with songs such as “I Want You Back” and “ABC” reaching number one in the US music chart before Michael’s twelfth birthday. Michael’s singing voice and dancing skills already stood out, so it was no surprise when he also began a solo career.

Michael’s solo album *Off the Wall* (1979) sold more than 20 million copies, but it was his next album, *Thriller* (1982), that made him an international superstar. The videos for two songs in particular, “Billie Jean” and “Thriller” (which gave its name to the album) were played over and over again on MTV. The “Thriller” video was a memorable piece of work, with Michael leading dozens of zombies (with such good make-up that they really did look scary) in a sequence of impressive dance moves. *Thriller* became – and still is – the most successful album of all time, selling around 110 million copies worldwide.

Although he would make other important albums in the future, and go on successful international tours, Michael’s mid-20s were the height of his career. It was downhill from then on. As he got older, Michael became as famous for his troubled personality as for his music. The bizarre change in his physical appearance – his African-American skin becoming much paler and his face changing shape – is well known. People wondered how much cosmetic surgery he had received, and whether or not he had some kind of skin disease.

Michael’s behavior became more and more eccentric, too, and childlike. He bought a ranch in California and named it “Neverland,” after the home of fictional character Peter Pan, who refused to grow up and become an adult. There, Michael collected toys and memorabilia, and built amusement park rides and a zoo. He kept many exotic animals, including a giraffe, snakes, a parrot, and tigers. He even had a chimpanzee named Bubbles for a pet. Many people suggested he was trying to compensate for not having had a childhood himself, because when he was a small boy his father had forced him to spend most of his time rehearsing and touring. Sad as his story may be, at least he gave us music that some say will last forever.

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WORKSHEET B

Exercise 1

Decide whether the following statements are true (*T*) or false (*F*), or if the text doesn't determine (*D*).

1. *Off the Wall* was Michael Jackson's first solo album.
2. The video for "Billie Jean" was played a lot on MTV.
3. The songs "I Want You Back" and "ABC" are from Michael's solo career.
4. *Thriller* is the second most successful album of all time.
5. Michael's father gave him a lot of freedom when he was a child.
6. Michael said he had never had cosmetic surgery.
7. Michael was ten when he started performing with the Jackson 5.
8. The "Thriller" video included dancing zombies.
9. *Thriller* was Michael's last album.
10. Michael had a rare skin disease.

Exercise 2

Answer the questions below.

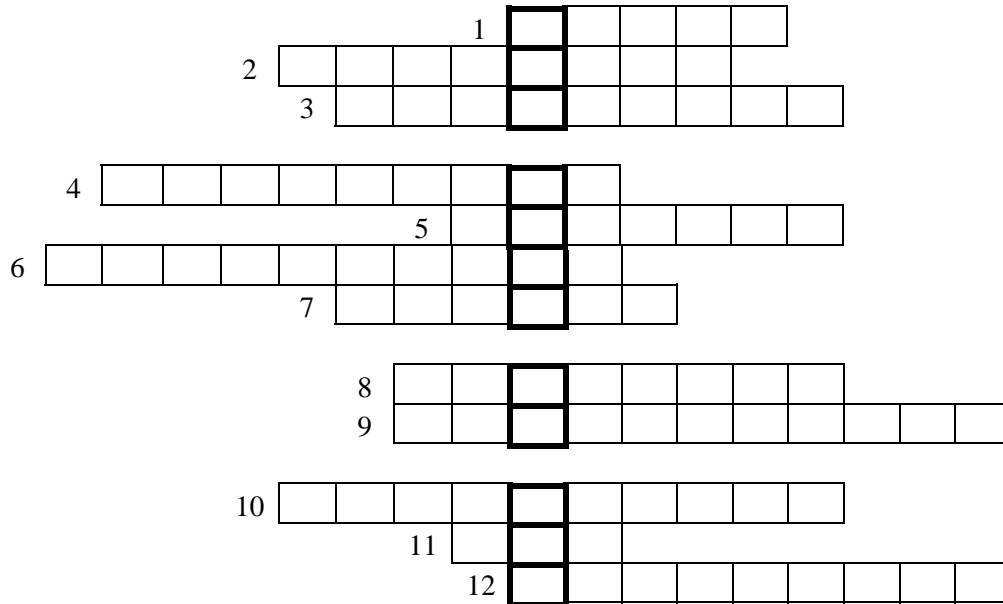
1. What was Neverland?
2. Who was Bubbles?
3. How many copies did the *Thriller* album sell worldwide?
4. Who were the five members of the Jackson 5?
5. Why did the zombies in the "Thriller" video look scary?
6. What two changes to Michael Jackson's physical appearance are mentioned in the text?
7. In what way could it be said that Michael didn't have a childhood?
8. According to the text, which of Michael's talents were already obvious when he was in the Jackson 5?

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WORKSHEET C

Exercise 3

Complete the crossword below. If all the words are correct, the title people sometimes use to refer to Michael Jackson will read from top to bottom.



1. Michael Jackson went on successful _____ both as a member of the Jackson 5 and, later, as a solo performer.
2. According to the text, things began to go _____ for Michael after *Thriller*.
3. Michael was not just famous: he was a _____.
4. The text describes Michael as a _____ adult.
5. The text describes the changes to Michael's physical appearance as _____.
6. Michael had to spend a lot of time _____ when he was a member of the Jackson 5.
7. The text suggests that the period around *Thriller* was the _____ of Michael's career.
8. Although extremely successful, Michael was also a _____ person.
9. Michael was extremely _____ in the history of pop music.
10. Michael had a pet _____.
11. The Jackson 5 were a _____ band.
12. Michael was a great _____.